

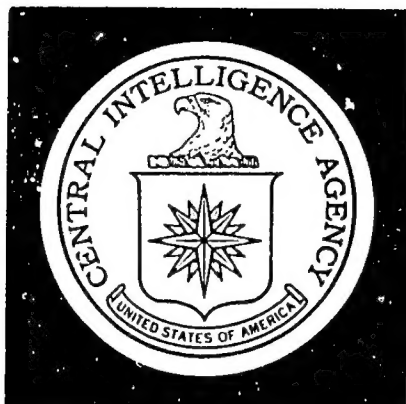
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DIRECTORATE OF
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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Sadat's Domestic Programs—The De-Nasirization of Egypt

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THE DE-NASIRIZATION OF EGYPT

Sadat's
Domestic
Programs





Former War Minister Fawzi, a Victim of Sadat's May Purge

When Anwar Sadat assumed the presidency of Egypt in October 1970, he inherited a government that had been shaped by the overwhelming personality of Nasir during the 16 years he served as Egypt's leader. The government and party apparatus reflected Nasir's thinking and style; it was composed of persons installed by him and loyal to him. Sadat, in the early months of his rule, was preoccupied with shoring up his position and was too weak to effect radical changes in government or party.

Changes in governing style were quickly apparent, however. Nasir's unquestioned control over the activities of the government and party had been reflected in the many roles he played—president, prime minister, commander in chief of the armed forces, and head of Egypt's sole legal political organization, the Arab Socialist Union. After his death, responsibility was parceled out to the fallen leader's principal heirs and no single individual was able to speak with Nasir's authority. Greater use of official consultative arrangements was made, and Sadat frequently conferred with both the cabinet and the Socialist Union.

This collegial arrangement was relatively short-lived. The "conspiracy" of April-May 1971

resulted in the purge of virtually all those individuals with whom Sadat had been by force of circumstance sharing authority. Although firm evidence of a coup attempt against the President has never been produced, there apparently was a move to restrict Sadat's growing tendency toward unilateral decision-making and to reaffirm the principle of collegial rule. The challenge was thwarted, however.

Those implicated included a number of the most powerful members of the government, the Socialist Union, and the public media. They were arrested, tried, and sentenced to prison terms of up to life at hard labor. Sadat used the opportunity to implement even more far-reaching changes. Under the banner of eliminating the "center of power," he proceeded with a wide-ranging restructuring of the government and party apparatus. Many of the changes were radical departures from the Nasir era, and they marked the beginning in earnest of the de-Nasirization of Egypt.

Policy Changes

Nasir paid lip service to democratic principles, but the repressive nature of his regime was



Sadat Burning Telephone Tap Files in May 1971

apparent to all and caused much unhappiness. Sadat has sought to broaden his popular appeal by repudiating many of the totalitarian controls common under Nasir. He makes frequent reference to the rule of law and the safeguarding of individual rights. He has declared sequestration—government seizure of private property, widely practiced by Nasir—illegal without a court order. Egypt's judiciary has been given a new measure of independence. Most political prisoners detained during the Nasir era have been released. Travel restrictions have been eased. A dramatic public burning of the files derived from tapes made by government eavesdroppers was staged to underscore Sadat's commitment to a society free from some of the repressions of the past. These measures have struck a responsive chord among Egyptians and have given a discernible boost to Sadat's popularity. Sadat's pledges of increased civil liberties are, however, tempered by his practice of "paternalistic authority." Many individual civil rights are still far from secure. As illustrated by his crackdown on those implicated in the May "conspiracy," Sadat is alert to any challenge to his authority. He dealt firmly with an unauthorized workers strike at the Helwan industrial complex in August and cracked down hard on a strike by taxi drivers in November.

Sadat's new order is apparent in the way he has addressed Egypt's economic problems. He announced a "Plan of National Action," one goal of which is to double the national income within ten years. In September he issued a series of decrees which, in sharp contrast to Nasirist practice, are designed to attract foreign private capital. Foreign investment was made more attractive by the creation of "free zones" for industrial development where many of the multitudinous financial regulations in force elsewhere will not apply. A new foreign trade and development bank was formed and has already attracted some foreign funds. Other features of the economic program envision decentralization of the state's industrial bureaucracy and a system of incentive payments. Raises in pay, allowances, and pensions are also planned. There is an obvious attempt to reap political capital involved here, but Sadat doubtless sincerely hopes that these actions will stimulate Egypt's economic development

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During his later years, Nasir appeared to lack the interest to deal effectively with Egypt's manifold social problems. Sadat has focused attention

Nasir to People's Assembly, 21 January 1969

"I want you to know that the military front must be our main preoccupation. Everything else can wait."

Sadat to Arab Socialist Union, 23 July 1971

"While we are thinking about the battle we must develop education. While we are living in the battle we must develop our services....The military battle should not hamper our construction in every field."

on the need to correct the nation's social ills. One aspect of his National Action program is a broad offensive against the problems facing rural Egyptians. Improvements in health, education, and social welfare are envisaged in order to bring the country's villages into the mainstream of Egyptian life. To date, little has been accomplished in spite of Sadat's increased attention to these problems, and effective solutions will be difficult to develop.

A New Constitution

In addition to policy changes, Sadat has made a number of revisions in the political framework of the country. Nasir had frequently promised the Egyptian people a permanent constitution but had deferred its promulgation until, as he put it, the adverse effects of the 1967 conflict with Israel had been eliminated. President Sadat viewed the promulgation of such a document as a useful element in his campaign to win popular support and strengthen his domestic position. Therefore, following the purge of May 1971, he declared himself in favor of drafting such a document. The resulting constitution was approved by popular referendum on 11 September.

Sadat's public repudiations of the totalitarian excesses prevalent during the Nasir era are codified in the new constitution. The new document emphasizes the rule of law and the safeguarding of individual rights, and in those areas it differs substantially from the provisional constitution that had been in effect since 1964. Even so, loopholes remain and the full development of personal liberties in Egypt is still some way off. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed in one constitutional article, others stipulate that Islam is the religion of the state. Religious (i.e., Islamic) education is a required subject in the nation's school system, and the Islamic Sharia (body of laws) is a main source of legislation. Citizens are entitled to form societies, but only in the prescribed manner. The new national code also provides for a nominal balance of powers between the judicial, legislative, and executive branches, but the balance appears weighted in favor of the president. The many presidential prerogatives include the appointment and removal of vice presidents, cabinet members, civil servants, and military personnel. Under special circumstances, the president may issue decisions having the force of law. Nevertheless, the increase in theoretical power that the constitution grants to the nation's parliament, plus its greater emphasis on civil

An anecdote currently delighting Egyptians has Sadat's chauffeur arriving at a crossroads and asking the President for instructions. "Which way did Nasir usually go?" asked Sadat. "He always went to the left," replied the driver. "Well," answered Sadat, "signal that you are going to the left and turn immediately to the right."

liberties, marks it as a generally more positive document.

Government Apparatus Restructured

In his efforts to rid the government of elements associated with those implicated in the May "conspiracy" and to shape it more closely to his own ruling style, Sadat has made a series of changes in the machinery of government. The role of the presidency in governmental supervision was strengthened by the creation of six presidential advisory bodies, staffed by trusted associates of Sadat. The precise power relationship between the advisers, the cabinet, and the other organs of government is not yet clear. It is probably intended that the advisers will assist Sadat in formulating policies that will then be carried out by the cabinet. Four different cabinets were formed during Sadat's first year in office as he consolidated his grip on the presidency and as his concept of government continued to develop. The first two cabinet shifts came shortly after Nasir's death, while the third and fourth were implemented following the May purge. The latter two resulted in the formation of cabinets the most notable feature of which was allegiance to President Sadat.

Egypt's legislative body was included in Sadat's program to revamp the government. The National Assembly, renamed the People's Assembly in mid-1971 to underscore its theoretical responsiveness to the dictates of the people, was reformed through new elections during October and November. Egypt's new constitution grants the 360-member assembly fairly broad prerogatives through which it could dominate a weak chief executive. In theory, the assembly has the power to investigate the activities of the executive branch and can withdraw its confidence from a prime minister or his deputy. It is also able, in principle, to impeach the president and can override a presidential veto. The assembly, in practice, has never seriously challenged the executive on any important issue. The new powers granted the assembly have yet to be exercised, and under the strong leadership of Sadat, the People's Assembly is likely to remain a center for discussion rather than decision. The constitution stipulates that in the event the president is permanently incapacitated, the president of the People's Assembly instead of the vice president temporarily assumes presidential duties.

Sadat's efforts to display concern for a greater degree of popular control over the



Crowd of Supporters at Sadat's Home

workings of the government have also led to changes in the structure of local government. Giving widespread publicity to the idea of transferring authority to the people, Sadat announced the creation of two new sets of councils at the provincial level. The People's Councils, which Sadat has portrayed as miniature legislatures, are to be constituted from members of the Socialist Union apparatus. The councils will be charged with overseeing the implementation of programs passed by the People's Assembly at the national level. Similarly, the provincial Executive Councils, described as diminutive cabinets, are composed of provincial officials whose job it is to administer the programs laid down by the central government. Neither of the bodies is expected to do more than provide an illusion of democratic process, although Sadat may genuinely hope that they will somehow stimulate a greater degree of initiative and responsibility at the provincial level. He has publicly decried "the terrible centralism" that characterizes the Egyptian Government and has expressed the hope that "not every grievance and complaint will come to Cairo." This characteristic lack of bureaucratic initiative is noted in the Egyptian proverb, "When a jar is broken in the province, the minister in Cairo is asked to approve the breakage."

Changes in the Arab Socialist Union

The challenge to Sadat's authority that precipitated the May purge was mounted from within the Arab Socialist Union, and the majority of the union's leadership was subsequently implicated. As a consequence, the organization was one of the first targets of Sadat's postpurge reformation. Although unhappy with the role of the union, Sadat elected to retain the basic framework of the organization as the "formula on which all of us must continue to rely in maintaining the alliance of the people's forces and practicing our political democracy." New elections were decreed for all levels of the organization. In these elections those elements whose loyalty to Sadat was suspect were skillfully eliminated. The elections, although eliciting more interest than past referendums, were marked by general indifference. They resulted in little more than a perfunctory re-establishment of the party machinery, now bearing Sadat's stamp instead of Nasir's. Sadat's appointment to the central committee of 30 members who owe fealty to no one but Sadat underscores his lack of faith in even a predetermined election. In addition, Sadat's retention of the post of chairman of the Socialist Union emphasized his determination to prevent

Sadat at the Suez Canal



the distribution of responsibilities from producing any checks and balances on him.

President Sadat's domestic initiatives have been hailed in the Egyptian media as "revolutionary," as the signal for launching a modern Egypt. Far-reaching changes have, in fact, taken place in a variety of fields since Nasir's death. The nation's institutions and domestic policies have been reformed and now accurately reflect the ideas and aspirations of President Sadat. The average Egyptian probably does enjoy a greater degree of civil liberty than he did under Nasir and there is little doubt that Sadat has created a freer and more open atmosphere in Egypt. The paternalistic authority of the Sadat regime is still there, however, and the development of a truly democratic political system is distant. Nasir's legacy in Egypt remains, but Sadat's ideas and policies are making an impact.

Sadat's initiatives have been successful to a great extent in winning for him the wide support he was seeking and in helping to divert public attention from the intractable problem of continued Israeli occupation of Egyptian territory. His commitment to end some of the arbitrary actions of his predecessor is a source of satisfac-

tion to Egypt's moderates. Sadat's moves to encourage foreign capital investment have given hope to those who resented Nasir's policy of extending state control over the economy. The moderate image that Sadat projects has won him the favor of conservative outside Egypt. One local businessman in Cairo was recently quoted as saying, "We have not been so happy for years. More than 70,000 Saudi Arabians and Kuwaitis came to spend their money here in Egypt this summer rather than in Lebanon." In the longer term the success of Sadat's domestic initiatives will depend to a great extent on a favorable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and on the resources and effort subsequently diverted to domestic programs.

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